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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [CH](#) [VN](#)
SUBJECT: DID HU JINTAO ASSESS VIETNAM'S POLITICAL REFORMS
AS NON-SOCIALIST?

REF: A. 06 BEIJING 03852
[1](#)B. 06 BEIJING 22131

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Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Daniel Shields.
Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) An officer at the Vietnamese Embassy said he finds credible reports circulating among ASEAN diplomats in Beijing that President Hu Jintao wrote the phrase "this is not Socialism" on a document Hu was given describing political reforms at Vietnam's April 2006 10th Party Congress. The question of what Vietnam's political reforms might mean for China attracted new attention after the reform-minded publication Southern Weekend listed 70-year-old reformer Zhou Ruijin as the first among its 12 candidates for person of the year in December. In July Zhou had pointed publicly to Vietnam's 2006 10th Party Congress's electoral reforms and solicitation of public opinion as ideas that China should emulate. Chinese scholars were skeptical about the leadership in Beijing moving ahead on such reforms now and in general were dismissive of the notion that China should emulate Vietnam. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) Vietnamese Embassy Political Officer Trinh Viet Thai stated, in response to questions from Poloff, that he finds credible reports circulating among ASEAN diplomats in Beijing that President Hu Jintao wrote the phrase "this is not Socialism" on a document Hu was given describing political reforms at Vietnam's April 2006 10th Party Congress. Embassy of Singapore DCM Yip Weikiat separately told Polmincouns that he had heard, but could not confirm, that Party guidance was circulated under instructions from Hu saying that while Vietnam's early political reforms were good, subsequent political reforms have gone too far and are not consistent with Socialism.

[1](#)3. (C) The question of what Vietnam's political reforms might mean for China attracted new attention after the reform-minded publication Southern Weekend listed 70-year-old reformer Zhou Ruijin as the first among its 12 candidates for person of the year in December. The issue was a hot topic of discussion among Chinese intellectuals prior to the Chinese Communist Party's Sixth Plenum in September, when intellectual debates over reform were raging (Ref A). In July, Zhou, a former top editor of the Party flagship paper The People's Daily, had publicly challenged China's leaders to emulate Vietnam's example on political reform. In a sharply worded article posted on the Internet, Zhou (also known by the pen name "Huangfu Ping," which he used with

others to defend Deng Xiaoping-era reforms) said that Vietnam had learned much from China's economic reforms but that the "student has now surpassed the teacher" demonstrating that accelerating political reform "is the correct way to go."

¶4. (SBU) Zhou complained that China was "bogged down in wrangling" over reforms, urging in particular that China learn from Vietnam in five areas:

- strengthening the role of the Party Central Committee in supervising the Politburo, including Central Committee approval by secret ballot of major policy proposals, personnel decisions and large engineering projects;

- establishing a system whereby Central Committee members may ask Party leaders, including the General Secretary, for explanations of pending decisions at plenums "until the answers are satisfactory";

- making public in advance a draft of the political report of Party Congresses in order to solicit the views of both Party members and the public at large;

- holding indirect Party elections with more candidates than posts, by secret ballot, and providing background information on candidates in advance of the elections and;

- raising the ratio of full-time representatives in the country's national legislature to 25 percent and allowing the legislature to question Government policies before live broadcast media.

¶5. (C) While Zhou's July article inspired some optimism among Chinese reformers about the possibility that real political reform would be included in the agenda for China's 17th Party Congress in fall 2007, contacts subsequently indicated that significant reforms were most likely not in

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the cards (Ref B). A well-connected former People's Daily editorial writer claimed that Hu Jintao came under pressure from pro- and anti-reform forces, but heeded the consensus among senior leaders against pursuing political reform.

¶6. (C) Several academics dismissed Zhou's suggestion that Vietnam could be a model for China's political reform, noting the differences between the two countries and expressing annoyance at the comparison. Director of People's University Contemporary Political Parties Institute Zhou Shuzhen (protect) told Poloff that any comparison between China's and Vietnam's political reforms is "misguided," noting that China is "more developed" than Vietnam and has little to learn from it. Cai Dingjian (protect), Professor at China University of Politics and Law and outspoken constitutional scholar and legal reformer, told poloff that Hu Jintao might endorse some inner-Party reforms, such as allowing more candidates than positions in some internal Party elections, but that emulating Vietnam's reforms was "out of the question."

¶7. (C) Separately, Beijing University's Faculty of Law Professor He Weifang (protect) said he had heard nothing about Hu's reported comments that Vietnam's reforms are "not Socialist" but acknowledged that "some elements" within the Party wish to use Vietnam's example to promote reform within the Chinese Communist Party. In general, reformists within the Party believe that internal democratic reforms can eventually lead to political reforms outside the Party. After all, how can China ever be democratic if its ruling Party is completely undemocratic, He asked rhetorically. Regardless of where it ends up on the question of political reform, however, the direction in which China needs to go is "fairly obvious," and Beijing "doesn't need to learn anything" from Hanoi, He concluded.

¶8. (C) China Institute for Contemporary International Relations Southeast Asia scholar Zhai Kun (protect) asserted

that China continues to research Vietnam's reforms and share experiences with Vietnam through a vibrant exchange between the Communist Party Schools in Beijing and Hanoi. Zhai, who stated he has no knowledge of Hu's reported negative assessment of Vietnam's political reforms, said China recognizes that Vietnam's reforms are quicker than its own. Vietnam's reforms can move faster, he claimed, because Vietnam does not face the same stability risks as China. For example, Vietnam can pursue relations with the Vatican because of its greater social and religious harmony and the absence of the Taiwan issue, he said.

19. (C) The Vietnamese Embassy's Thai acknowledged that exchanges between the Vietnam and Chinese Central Party Schools were strengthened during Nong Duc Manh's August 2006 visit to China. Thai stated, however, that Party School exchanges are focused more on theory and less on practical reforms. He commented that Chinese who write about Vietnam's reforms as a possible model for China to follow are using Vietnam's reforms to justify their own political positions.

Comment

10. (C) Hu's reported dismissal of Vietnam's reforms as "not Socialist" is not likely to stand in the way of continued experiments with local Party elections and other ongoing governance experiments condoned by the Center. It is likely to be effective, however, in cutting off discussion in China of whether China can learn from Vietnam in the area of political reform.

RANDT